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Report Highlights:

Food crisis here to stay, says Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, *Pawar issues warning as government talks enhanced food help*, *President Pratibha Patil seeks another Green Revolution in address to nation*, *Bt brinjal divides environment, agri ministries*, *1.4 lakh birds culled in flu-affected areas of Bengal*, *Energy, sports drinks under Food Authority scanner*, *Hyderabad not to lose 'seed capital' crown*.

General Information:

Welcome to Hot Bites from India, a weekly summary of issues of interest to the U. S. agricultural community. The report includes information that has been garnered during travel within India, reported in the local media, or offered by host country officials and agricultural analysts. Press

articles are included and summarized in this report. Significant issues will be expanded upon in subsequent reports from this office. Minor grammatical changes have been made for clarification.

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FOOD CRISIS HERE TO STAY, SAYS PRIME MINISTER MANMOHAN SINGH

In his first meeting with the chief secretaries from the states, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that India needs to shake off its "false" sense of food security as demand for food will continue to rise as income grows. Warning of further pressure on supplies, he said that "The state governments must forge appropriate strategies to bolster food production and tackle shortage of essential supplies. Boosting farm output is urgent as India will never be free from swings in international prices in a globalised world. Our agricultural productivity still ranks far below the best in the world." Food prices have gone through the roof since the last drought due to the shortage of sugar, edible oils, rice and lentils. On December 5, 2009, the food inflation touched an 11-year high of 19.95 percent. (Source: Hindustan Times, 02/02/2010)

PAWAR ISSUES WARNING AS GOVERNMENT TALKS ENHANCED FOOD HELP

The Indian government is looking to increase the amount of grain it had decided to offer as part of measure to combat inflation to 12 kilograms a family and also extend the scheme for the entire year. However the Food Ministry has expressed its apprehension over sustaining the program. The move is meant to combat food inflation by strengthening supplies but the Food Ministry is apprehensive that this could jeopardize food security. The Food Ministry proposal to offload 3.6 million tons was aimed at both tempering food inflation and reducing pressure to the tune of 3 million tons on FCI stocks in time for the new wheat marketing season beginning March. The nodal ministry is keen on sticking with tender-based open market sales to bulk users as the key means to temper food inflation. Food inflation has shot up to 17.40 percent as compared to 16.81 percent for the week ending January 16 on account of high prices of vegetables, pulses, poultry and spices. The Central government expects its wheat buys to be higher than last year's record-breaking level of 25 million tons and projects wheat stocks of 14 million tons by April 1 which is well above the 4 million tons buffer norm for the period. (Source: Economic Times, 01/30/2010)

PRESIDENT PRATIBHA PATIL SEEKS ANOTHER GREEN REVOLUTION IN ADDRESS TO NATION

President Pratibha Patil in her address to the nation on the eve of the 61st Republic Day took note of the burning issue of rising prices of food grains to underline the need for a second Green Revolution-focused on increasing agriculture productivity. On the issue of rising prices, she said

that there was a need to harness potential of village economies while developing models of engagement with the farming community. She also said that there should be use of new technologies, better seeds, improved farming practices, effective water management techniques as well as more intense frameworks for connecting the farmer with the scientific community, with lending institutions and with markets. She cautioned that the synergy between farmers and industry has to be done in a farmer-friendly manner. (Source: Indian Express, 01/26/2010)

BT BRINJAL DIVIDES ENVIRONMENT, AGRI MINISTRIES

Faced with growing voices against commercial cultivation of genetically modified Bt brinjal, the Environment Minister, Jairam Ramesh said that the final decision on the issue would be taken sometime around February 10. He also said that Bt cotton and Bt brinjal could not be equated considering Bt brinjal to be a vegetable and an important part of Indian diet. The biotechnology regulator, Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) had last year given its nod for commercial release of Bt brinjal. But after protests from environmental groups and brinjal-growing states, the Environment Minister decided to hold public hearings in regions where the vegetable is grown. While the Agriculture Ministry appears to be in favor of the cultivation of Bt brinjal, the Environment Minister, Ramesh is likely to take a cautious stand and support the position taken by environment groups. Sources say that this issue will be raised in the next session of the Parliament. (Source: Tribune, 02/03/2010)

1.4 LAKH BIRDS CULLED IN FLU-AFFECTED AREAS OF BENGAL

Ever since the fresh outbreak was first reported from Hazrabati and Nagar villages in Khargram blocks of Murshidabad district on January 14, about 1.4 lakh birds have been culled and 17,420 eggs destroyed in bird flu-infected districts of West Bengal. According to an official statement, more outbreaks have been reported from Haripur, Ninur, Pathai, Jhajra and Sankarpur villages and the State government has also notified outbreak of bird flu in Faridpur, Budua, Khorjona and Simulia villages of Burwan block. A three-member central rapid response team from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has been stationed in the State to assist the health authorities. Health officials suspect that chickens and eggs illegally transported from Bangladesh, which itself has been reeling under its own outbreak, could have been responsible for the spread of the disease in India. (Source: Financial Express, 02/02/2010)

ENERGY, SPORTS DRINKS UNDER FOOD AUTHORITY SCANNER

The government plans to put a cap on the caffeine level in energy and sports drinks which may impact the food and beverage majors that promote such drinks. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), an autonomous statutory body administered by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, is in the process of drafting standards for energy and sports drinks. Energy

and sports drinks have 150-200 parts per million caffeine, which has narcotic effects and is not recommended for children and pregnant women. If mixed with alcohol, energy drinks double the intoxication level. Developed nations have a protocol on energy and sports drinks but do not have any cap as yet. FSSAI Chairman, P.I. Suvrathan told Business Standard that "The standards will be ready by March. We will introduce stricter standards for these drinks, considering that, unlike developed nations, Indians consumers are still new to these drinks and quite unaware of the effects." (Source: Business Standard, 02/02/2010)

HYDERABAD NOT TO LOSE 'SEED CAPITAL' CROWN

"Hyderabad is and will remain the Seed Capital of India as no other place offers the kind of locational advantage and environment conducive for both breeding and seed production and storage," says Mr. K.V. Subba Rao, Country Manager of Pioneer Hi-Bred International, a DuPont subsidiary. Apart from companies like Pioneer, Bayer BioScience, Kaveri Seeds, Zuari Seeds and Advanta India, Monsanto and Syngenta India are increasingly focusing their research and molecular breeding activity in Hyderabad. Dr. Paresh Verma, Director (Research) at the Bioseed Research India Pvt. Ltd. said that Hyderabad has both the dry weather and moderate temperatures which is required for seed production. (Source: Business Line, 01/27/2010)

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